



*The U.S. Army Corps of  
Engineers flag flown by  
Portland District.*

# Epilogue

Since Major Robert established an engineer office in Portland over a century ago, the scope of work undertaken by the Portland District has expanded enormously. At the same time, the geographic dimensions of the district have contracted with the creation of the Seattle District in 1896 and the Walla Walla District in 1948. From its 19th century rivers and harbor work benefitting navigation to its additional 20th century responsibilities for flood control and multiple-purpose projects, the Portland District's guiding principle has been to shape the natural environment for the growth and development of the Pacific Northwest.

In carrying out its mission, the district experienced its share of conflict and controversy over the years. But the district's dedication and commitment to the well-being of the people of the region it served has never been questioned. The 57 army officers in charge from 1871 to 1980 established a solid record for engineering excellence and sound judgment. While committed to the growth of the region, the 19th century engineer officers resisted proposing projects lacking sound economic and engineering justification. Of the 47 preliminary examinations performed between 1871 and 1895, only 22 produced requests for a full-scale survey. During the same period, the Portland office conducted 40 surveys which resulted in 27 recommendations for improvements.

The district engineers of the 20th century have increasingly focused on planning and management functions. The gradual completion of the most feasible navigation, flood control, and multiple-purpose projects shifted the district's mission away from initial project engineering and construction activities. Changing conditions on the Columbia, Willamette, and Snake Rivers and their tributaries required periodic up-dates of the original 308 reports. The district's contribution to the various long-range river basin studies such as the Columbia-North Pacific Study, the Columbia River and Tributaries Study, and the Willamette Basin Comprehensive Study required major allocations of personnel and fiscal resources. In addition, the district participated in the analysis of water resources for the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area and studied the feasibility of numerous small navigation and flood control projects. Other management-type responsibilities included operating a permit system for work on or dumping material in navigable waterways, providing flood plain management services, and planning lakeshore usage at Corps reservoirs.

Along with the continuing shift away from the Portland District's traditional scope of work came an increased public involvement in its decision-making process. Sound planning and environmental concerns required the district to systematically solicit public views in formulating study issues and arriving at policy recommendations. The ultimate decision making still lay with the Corps but politically acceptable recommendations required a measure of open planning.

In the spring of 1980, the district had 1,350 employees organized into 18 technical divisions and independent offices. Military officers constituted less than 1 percent of the staff. Women made up 20.8 percent of the work force and minorities 6.7 percent. When the district hired its first women in 1899, a "stenographer and typewriter," she represented about 3 percent of the office personnel. The district engineer considered this a significant employment action, requiring the specific approval of the Chief of Engineers. During the 1970s, the Corps increased its efforts to provide equal employment opportunities for minorities and women. In 1972, the Portland District appointed its first equal employment officer with responsibility for affirmative action programs. The district reaffirmed its commitment to the Corps' goal of equal opportunity by implementing in 1977 a plan detailing its obligations to employees, to contractors and their employees, and to architect-engineering firms.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1871, the Portland District has helped foster the development of the Oregon country through engineering excellence. It has used the tools of technology to assist economic growth and to serve various human needs. Its 19th century engineering surveys and 20th century comprehensive basin studies have provided the basic data for intelligent regional planning, involving flood control, navigation, and multiple-purpose structures. The

Portland District's multifaceted accomplishments provide a solid foundation for its future mission in water resource development in the Pacific Northwest.